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CLASSES AND MASSES

STRIKES and conferences; conferences and strikes. These for months past have made up the industrial history of the nation. Never before were they so numerous. Never were they so varied. Never did they seem so futile; causeless on the one hand, fruitless on the other; though that any of the strikes were really causeless, or, rather, let us say purposeless, or that any of the conferences were entirely void of results, philosophy forbids us to believe.

There have been crowded upon us strikes of almost every conceivable description; in almost every occupation in the index, from actors to zymotechnists; on almost every imaginable pretext, and upon none at all. Most of these, we have been assured, were not sanctioned by that American Federation of Labor which is commonly regarded as the chief and most authoritative exponent of "organized labor," and some of them incurred its unfavorable criticism; though we cannot recall that it effectively used its vast power and influence to prevent or to end any of them, while it did lend its support, either actively or passively, to some of the most indefensible.

There have also been numerous industrial conferences, some partisan, some professedly non-partisan. There was the national convention of the American Federation of Labor, marked by an animated conflict between the con-

servative and radical factions of that body, in which the former was credited with the victory. There was the President's tripartite conference, with its exalted aims, its eminent membership, its elaborate organization, and its untimely end. There was that international conference which the President insisted upon summoning though the heavens should fall; and which accordingly met under the most anomalous and paradoxical circumstances ever recorded of such a gathering. For it met by virtue of a treaty which had not yet been ratified, as a part of the operations of a League of Nations which had not yet been organized, it received as delegates alien enemies from a country with which we were technically still at war, and its opening sessions were coincident with debates in the Senate as to whether it should ever be authorized! There were the labor provisions in the Treaty of Versailles, consideration of which transformed the United States Senate practically into a labor conference. There is, finally, not to make the line stretch out to the crack of doom, the coming conference, on December 13, of the American Federation of Labor, the railroad brotherhoods, and the farmers.

What this last-mentioned gathering will prove to be is yet to be seen. But in one respect it is in advance of the most significant of them all. That is because of the salient expression in the call which was issued for it, which suggests, unintentionally but most shrewdly, one of the prime causes of the failure of other conferences to accomplish the good that was expected and also one of the chief motives of most of the strikes with which industry has been scourged.

"Labor," said that pronouncement, meaning, of course, "organized" labor, "is confronted with grave dangers affecting the very foundation of its structure."

It was in order to avert these dangers that the convention was called, and we may therefore expect that when it meets, a fortnight hence, the gathering will devote its chief attention to promoting the interests of "organized" labor. On the face of it that may seem natural and proper. In fact it means that the convention will consider, and that the national political party which is expected to be formed will aim to promote, the interests of a specific and minority class of the people, instead of the whole nation. That we must regard as an ominous and a mischievous thing.

Speaking on the subject not long ago, Governor James P. Goodrich, of Indiana, well said:

"There is no more dangerous force operating among us today than the class-minded man, whether he is a laborer, capitalist or farmer—the one who demands a privilege for his class at the expense of the American people."

Mr. Goodrich had already referred to the great evils of having corporations and capitalists seek special privileges for themselves as a class regardless of the common welfare, and he made the point that class-mindedness and the seeking of class-advantage on the part of workingmen and their organizations were equally pernicious. That such a spirit does prevail among them is unhappily obvious. In the manifestoes of strikers, and notably in those of the bituminous coal strikers, who above all others menaced the vital interests of the whole people, there has seldom if ever been a word about the interests and needs of the public, or about the duty of industrialists to the public. Everything is about the interests of a class. Tacitly there is a repetition of the old misinterpreted objurgation, "The public be damned!" The strikers want higher wages, fewer hours of work, or the closed instead of the open shop, and in order to get it they purpose to paralyze industries that are essential to the public welfare without ever a thought of the interests of the public. It is a class against the mass of the people.

In this there is also entirely too much talk about rights and too little about those responsibilities which must always be commensurate with rights. There is much talk about the duty which employers and even the public owe to workingmen, the duty of paying them living wages and more, of giving them ample hours of leisure, and of maintaining satisfactory conditions of employment; but seldom indeed do we hear of the reciprocal and equally imperative duty of workingmen to keep the necessities of the public supplied. It is easy to argue the duty of employers to pay wages which will assure their employes fuel to keep their families warm during the winter. But it is just as cogently to be argued that it is the duty of the miners to keep up the production of coal so that all the other families in the land can be kept warm. There would be no limit to the denunciation of railroad managers who should suspend the

running of trains and thus put the public to untold inconvenience, suffering and loss, just to compel the Government to permit them to charge higher rates. But it is difficult to see in what respect it is less reprehensible for train hands to strike and thus suspend the running of trains and thus subject the public to those same conditions, just to compel the companies to pay them higher wages.

What needs to be understood is that there are not only two but three parties concerned in industrial disputes, and that the third party, the public, is the greatest of the three. "*Salus respublicae suprema lex*" means in the last analysis that the welfare of the people as a whole—the national mass, and no mere class—is the supreme consideration, in industrial economics as well as in politics and diplomacy. Men need to get rid of mere class-minds, and to think nationally, with minds which comprehend the mass of the people.

Another conspicuous error in recent industrial and economic discussions, and one which was particularly obvious and mischievous in the President's tripartite conference at Washington,—perhaps the chief cause of its regretted collapse,—was the attempt to deal with permanent principles on the basis of temporary conditions; or, to change the figure, to treat symptoms instead of striking at the root of the disease. The aim seemed to be to adapt relations to abnormal conditions, instead of trying to bring conditions back to a normal status. It is obvious that workingmen need higher wages, if they do need them, because of the high cost of living. It is also obvious that the cost of living is high partly because wages are so high, and partly—in many cases chiefly—because decreased productivity has interfered with the law of demand and supply. What, then, is the solution of the problem? If we were considering, as too many do, the interests of a mere class, we might say, increase the wages, as the men demand. But that would be a temporary makeshift, for it would quickly be followed by a corresponding increase in cost of living. The trouble is not that wages are too low, which is a class evil, but that prices are too high, which is a universal evil. The solution is to be found, then, in reduction of prices rather than in increase of wages, and prices are to be reduced by dealing with the causes which make them so high.

We have mentioned two of those causes. With one of them we may not deal. Reduction of wages would reduce the cost of living. But that is not to be thought of. If wages are reduced, it must be after the cost of living has come down. But the other cause might be and should be dealt with, and it is on the whole probably the more potent of the two. Let us cite some expert opinions concerning it. Mr. Herbert Hoover, as his parting gift to Europe, left a memorandum in which he said:

"Unless productivity can be rapidly increased, there can be nothing but political, moral, and economic chaos, finally interpreting itself in loss of life on a scale hitherto undreamed of. . . . No economic policy will bring food to those stomachs or fuel to those hearths that does not secure the maximum production. There is no use of tears over rising prices; they are, to a great degree, a visualisation of insufficient production."

The Rev. Dr. Charles Eaton, of New York, also gave a farewell message to England when he returned from his work in that country a short time ago. He said:

"The country faces the absolute necessity of work being done—simple, plain, everyday work that has as its object the production of houses and clothes and food and machinery and fuel, and all the ordinary necessities of life. I see no way of getting this done by Acts of Parliament or by fine programmes of social reform or by strikes and lock-outs, or even by hearings before learned commissions. The only way to get coal is to dig it out of the mine. . . . A coal miner will risk his life without hesitation to rescue a drowning child from the river; but the same child may die of pneumonia this winter because the same miner, for some inscrutable reason, is permitted by his union to work only a few hours a day. This theory and this practice have nothing to do with the needs, rights or wrongs of the worker. They are the expression of a wild, revolutionary purpose to destroy the so-called capitalistic system by reducing hours and output to a minimum and increasing wages to a maximum."

Nothing could be more perfectly applicable than that to the bituminous coal strike of last month in this country. For there is only too good reason to believe that the "wild, revolutionary purpose" described by Dr. Eaton is operative

here as well as in England. Mr. Hoover, already quoted, also refers to it, as "the theory that the limitation of effort below physical necessity will increase the total employment or improve their condition." In other words, some labor agitators have been deliberately decreasing productivity, so as to make the supply of necessities less than the demand; so as thus to raise prices and increase the cost of living, so as thus to afford a pretext for demanding higher wages. It would be difficult to imagine anything more immoral and more insane.

We must regard it as unfortunate that amid the multiplicity of industrial and economic conferences we could not have one, representative and authoritative, devoted expressly to the promotion of productivity, so as to restore normal conditions of supply and demand. When that was accomplished, when the nation was brought back to a normal economic basis, it would be time to consider what scale of wages and of hours could be adopted for the maintenance of those normal conditions, and to what share of the profits of industry the workmen were entitled. Until such a basis is reached, all these latter considerations are a mere putting of the cart before the horse.

The only just, and therefore satisfactory and lasting, settlement of economic problems must be effected on the dual basis of normal conditions of demand and supply and of the interests of all the people. In order to attain the former of these, some degree of sacrifice and endurance will be necessary; such as the masses of the people are now suffering. The millions of consumers of coal are suffering from the high price of that necessary commodity, just as much as the miners are suffering from low wages. So the millions of consumers of all sorts of products are suffering from high prices, just as much as the workmen are suffering from low wages or the employers are suffering from being compelled to pay high wages. It may well be believed, indeed, that such suffering of the general public is greater than that of either the employer class or the employe class. The people are willing to suffer until the evil conditions can be abated, and they have a right to expect these classes to do the same. Especially have they a right to expect and to demand that no class, whether of capitalists or wage-earners, will do anything to aggravate those evil conditions

or to delay or obstruct their abatement and the return to a normal basis.

It may perhaps be profitable to have it understood that the patience of the public will not last forever. The masses of the people will not—they should not—forever supinely submit to be used as pawns in the game between capital and labor and then be made to pay the stakes of the game, no matter which side wins. They will insist—they should insist—that their interests, being the interests of the whole which comprehends all the parts, are paramount above those of any part or class. If that fact is not recognized and put into effective practice, the masses will one day exclaim to the classes, "A plague o' both your houses!" and will put them both under their own inexorable control.

That will not mean government ownership or government operation of industries. It will mean a legal control of them for the good of the whole nation. All other activities of social life are subject to such control, and endure it without repining. It rests with industrialists, and at this time especially with the wage-earners of "organized labor," to determine to what extent they may, through good behavior, remain a law unto themselves or, through disregard of the public welfare, be subjected to the authority of the State. At whatever cost, the class rule of Sovietism and Bolshevism shall not be imposed upon the masses of the American nation.

SAVING THE RAILROADS

THERE is ground for hope that the railroads will be saved from ruin. That they are in danger of ruin unless something is speedily done for their salvation is undeniable. We may say more than that, their wholesale bankruptcy is practically certain unless Congress within the next few weeks enacts a measure for their relief. The ground for hope of their salvation is found in the manifested inclination of Congress to take the necessary action.

These are the circumstances: Government control and operation of the roads for nearly two years have so disorganized them and so increased their expenses above their revenues as to make them subject to an incessant deficit.